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Israeli A-Missile Deployments Unconfirmed

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The State Department said yesterday it could not confirm a report that Israel has begun deploying nuclear-armed Jericho missiles, but issued a statement reaffirming U.S. policy to "seek to prevent" the spread of nuclear explosives to other countries.

The report, in the May 1 issue of Aerospace Daily, quoted unidentified sources as saying Israel had begun deployment of "a number of Jericho II nuclear-armed intermediate-range ballistic missiles" on erector-launcher trucks in the Negev Desert and Golan Heights.

State Department and Pentagon officials either refused comment or expressed skepticism about the report's authenticity. "I don't know any basis in fact for it," one official said.

An Israeli embassy official categorically denied that Israel had nuclear-tipped missiles.

Western intelligence services have believed for some time that Israel may have up to 200 low-yield nuclear warheads that could be fitted into Jericho missiles or carried by aircraft. The new element in the Aerospace Daily report is the suggestion that Jericho IIs armed with nuclear weapons have been deployed.

However, a former National Security Council official said yesterday that Israel may have deployed nuclear weapons on missiles as early as 1973.